Plex Romer.

MIKE
3
NEW
Stories
The GHOST PILOT
The MARIONETTES
The SECRET of the VALLEY
of NAGELLA
No. 958
100
PAGES
FREW

You have to *help*, Mike! Don't go all *floppy!*
"RICKLET! WHERE'S MY MANNY?"
He was with us in the booth at the *Copa*...
Dom's Lounge...
Dungeon Club... Gangplanks... Rosey's...
Piggy backing that secretary Paula in and out of the *gents* all night. I didn't have a shot in hell.
"And it was her idea to go back to Gangplanks for the *karaoke*..."
"Then I was blindfolded and you were getting a nice *carry-me-back*."
"I don't do it like that, Rick. Don't have me in your memory like that. "

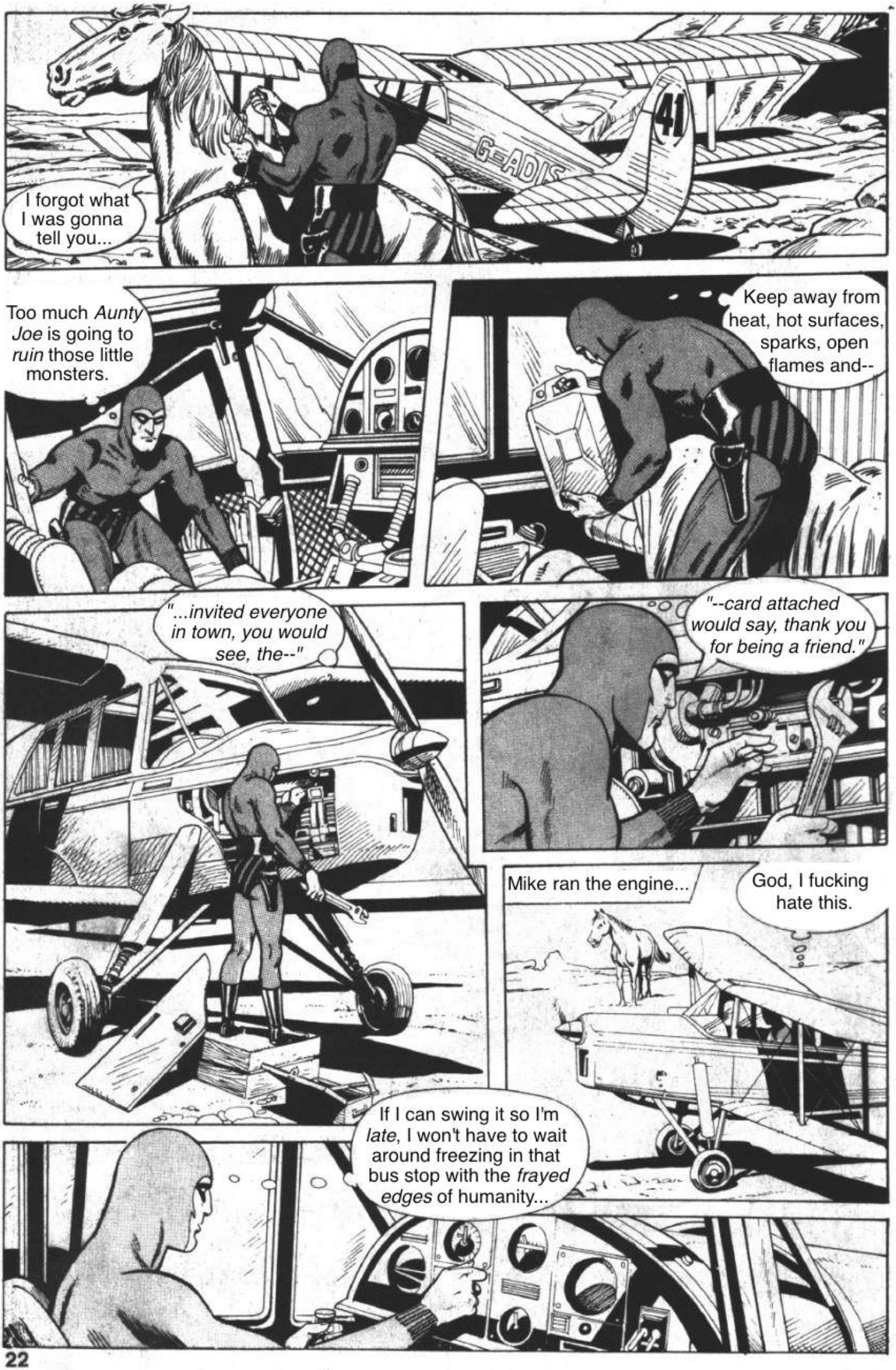
That last rum must have...
Got you laid out in a *stretcher?* Four guys named *Lou?*
"I walked. Wait. Did he zip off from Gangplanks real quick?"
He offered to pop down the road for more rum.
Bar prices, Rick. Manny has a thing.
Was Manny... I saw people just... *giving him money.* Is that...?
All the time. You want some take-away?
I should be able to keep it down by the time we get back.
G-ADIS
Pizza?
Rick's kind of starting to *chafe.*
Like a man sent out onto the pitch with half a moustache...
Now, did Joe say they'd be all done by two? *Gotta wait in that damn bus stop...*
I can't let her know I know.
The *lies...* So *boring.*

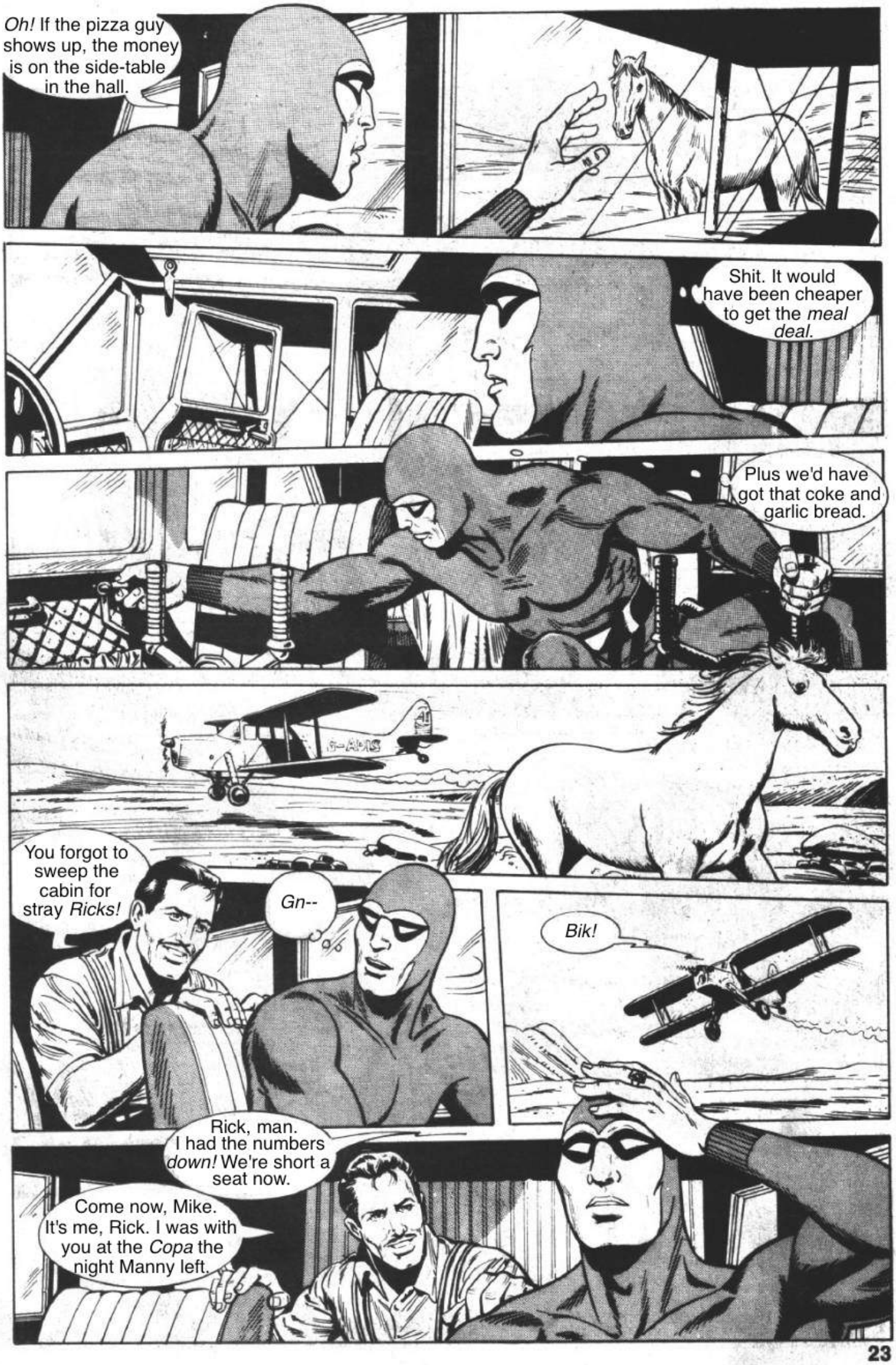
The ride home was not easy on his back.
Yo, L-Bone! Hey, has Manny made it back yet?
Dunno, man. I've been out back fixing bikes.
I'm making a *double banger.* Pretty nuts, eh?
Yeah, look. Lou. Those are starting to pile up.
And, in lieu of pain-killers...
Can one of you little monsters put the oven on? I need some--.
God damn... She had to take the kids...
Unused to the quiet, Mike couldn't sleep...
--Mikey and me went to the music shop in town to get the new reeds. A man hit at Mikey and call him the...
If Deb ever reads these... *One Mike, two Mike, three Mike, four...* My keys are gonna be useless.
Fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck, fuck.

"It's a tall glass of rum next to a smaller, wider glass of rum..." God damn *Companions*. You can't replace a guy with a drink, Mike...
Mikey, you might not realise this, but--
Mikey, *you* might not realise--...
Mikey, you might not realise this, but you talk *out loud* when you read.
You've been piping Manny's diary into my head all *night*.
I think I have what it takes to be your new boy.
"It could be *us*, Mikey. You and me, battling the waves! Our sails, *full of wind!*"

He's cast off, Mike. He's undone the ropes. You're *drifting*...
"You need to find a new island soon. *I could be that island. I know I could... I've got coconut trees on my beaches...*"
And look forward to twice the wardrobe. You're what, a thirty-six waist?
I have some lovely jackets, Mike. Truly.
What in the hell's gotten into Rick? This is some alien *replicant* gear... *New boy!?*
At *best*, he's an outside shot for third, after Petey and Jen, should they take human form.
What do you say?
Gonna get a little belly?
I--. Well, if... If that's... I suppose I could tuck away a few more jam donuts...
How about some broken English?
Now come on, Mike. That might be a step too far.
I'm gonna need you a little *shorter*.
TAKE ME AS I AM!

Mike, I'm sorry. I know I got a little bit *hot* there, that's not who I am.
I need a little tum, some wibbly-wobbly English, and *I'm* the top dog around here.
I'll tell you what'd really get you a big tick is some brass or wood-wind chops. I'm a--. Oh... Right.
What's your take on the guy, Jen? Are you one of Rick's girls?
I don't know... He's showing a lotta heart, sure. But...
I'll get the oven on, just let me take a piss.
Make sure no one turns it off, huh? Manny's gonna be a hungry little grub when he gets in.
Big, blue sky...
I've got a special job for you, Petey.


I forgot what I was gonna tell you...
G-ADIS
41
Too much *Aunty Joe* is going to *ruin* those little monsters.
Keep away from heat, hot surfaces, sparks, open flames and--
"...invited everyone in town, you would see, the--"
"--card attached would say, thank you for being a friend."
Mike ran the engine...
God, I fucking hate this.
If I can swing it so I'm *late*, I won't have to wait around freezing in that bus stop with the *frayed edges* of humanity...


Oh! If the pizza guy shows up, the money is on the side-table in the hall.
Shit. It would have been cheaper to get the meal deal.
Plus we'd have got that coke and garlic bread.
You forgot to sweep the cabin for stray Ricks!
Gn--
Bik!
Rick, man. I had the numbers down! We're short a seat now.
Come now, Mike. It's me, Rick. I was with you at the Copa the night Manny left.

Soon.
Come *on*, Rick. What did I *just* say about the seats? Manny'd never pull this type of *stubborn* shit.
Mike, I just put down *forty* jam-boys! I'm done for!
I wanted to show a good *tum* for you...
No shit!? You're working on a *tum!?* Rick! *Lotta heart!*
You want it bad?
Come on, Rick. Cut it out.
"Huh? No idea. Just kick it off the seat. So how was--..."
Since ancient times, Rick, wing-men have kept *all* the skin. *Pfft.*
Fin.